THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

THE BHIKKHU SĪLĀCĀRA

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THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA
1922

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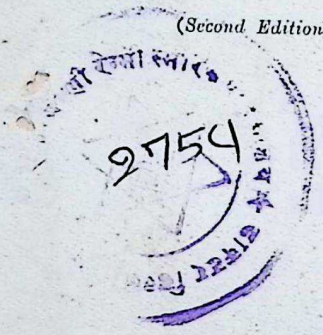

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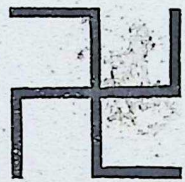

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Ye that will tread the Middle Road, whose course
Bright Reason traces and soft Quiet smoothes;
Ye who will take the high Nirvāṇa-way,
List the Four Noble Truths.

The Light of Asia

CHAPTER I

FINDING

Long ago in a little kingdom of northern India, there lived a king who had a son whom he greatly loved. And because his son was dear to his heart, he provided him with everything that mind could imagine and a king's power obtain, to make him happy and pleased with his life. He gave him a fine palace to live in, magnificent gardens in which to walk and take the air, splendid horses and elephants to ride, lovely musicians to make music for him as often as he should wish for such amusement and, finally, when the Prince came of age, his father found for him a beautiful and devoted wife who, in course of time, bore to him a charming little son. Thus in respect of possessions there was nothing more that the young Prince could ask for. In his person also, he was a man to be envied. He was handsome in face and figure, with a complexion like shining gold to look upon, and his

manly vigour and strength were such that few were able to shoot an arrow as far as he, or hold in better control a restless and high-spirited charger. Nor was his mind any whit behind his body in capacity and accomplishments; for, under the best teachers procurable, he had learned with ease all that the science of his time had to teach.

But one day he saw a sight that brought a black and sudden cloud over the sunny sky of his all pleasant life. It was not a very uncommon sight—only an old beggar, his limbs all a-tremble with extreme age, who stooped upon a staff and in a pitiful voice asked an alms. But this day, as the Prince saw the sight, the eyes of his understanding also were opened, and he turned homeward very grave, thinking deeply. And the longer he pondered upon that which he had seen, the more serious became his mien, the more troubled his brow.

"What is this that I have seen?" he said to himself. "What is this that I have seen? A man truly, just as I am a man, but—what a man! I am rich, have abundance of all good things that I can wish, but he is so poor that he has to come out upon the public ways and beg, only that he may obtain food. I stand upright upon my feet, but he leans upon a stick. I am sound in wind and limb, but he, all trembling, scarce can shape the words that would serve his need. My face is fresh and full, his all withered and sunken. What is this? Who has done this thing?"

And the answer came: "This is decrepitude and old age; and time, change, the years, have done this thing."

"And shall time and change and the years do this to me also?" asked the Prince of himself, and had to reply: "Yes, rich as is your father, at any time one stronger than he may come and wrest him from his throne, and drive forth him and his into exile and poverty. Into the midst of your health and strength, disease like a leopard may pounce, ravening, and leave you even as this poor palsied wretch. And should you escape these ills, yet, little by little, the years as they pass irrecoverably will steal from you cunning of eye and of hand and of brain, and you too shall become old and, at the latter end of all, die."

So ran the thoughts of the Prince as he paced to and fro in his solitary chamber, and he grew sorrowful, exceeding sorrowful. "I—I too—like this must grow old and die," he said to himself. "I and all men, rich and powerful and young and strong as we may be—some day we all must grow old and die!" And, though his loveliest musicians came before him and smiling on him played their sweetest, he could find no more delight in them. No more he cared to ride his proud and mettlesome steed or take part in the play of the bow and arrow. His splendid pleasure-grounds, with all their glories of flower and tree and gleaming lotus-ponds, had wholly lost their beauty in his saddened eyes.

"What does all this avail?" the Prince demanded. "For me and for all men, old age and death are lying in wait, and, do what we will, we cannot escape them. What boots a pleasure that will not stay?—that departs beyond all recall and leaves us comfortless? Give me a happiness sure, unchanging, abiding! That is what I and all men need. Where is that happiness? Where may it be found?" But none could tell the Prince where it was to be found—that happiness that would stay, that would not depart and leave men comfortless—a happiness sure, unchanging and abiding.

Then the Prince said within himself: "Of a surety, this is not well; an ill thing is this, that men should be ever subject to such calamity. No longer can I live amid delights that no more yield delight—no longer stay among pleasures that have altogether ceased to please. Forth I must go from them, and seek—seek until I find some means whereby I and all men may escape these grievous ills, sickness, old age and death."

And as the Prince resolved, so he did. To the sorrow of weeping parents and kinsfolk and the bitter grief of his heart-broken wife, he put off all his princely state and passed forth from his palace, henceforth to live the life of a wandering beggar and, as he wandered, to ask each sage or ascetic who crossed his path if he knew any way whereby men might win abiding freedom from the dominion of

sickness, and old age, and death. And, attaching himself to such of these ascetics as were famed for the greatness of their learning and the extent of their powers, he took them one after another for his teachers and, making himself their humble disciple, did in all things whatsoever they laid it upon him to do. Under them he learned many things that he had not known before, and gained power to penetrate into realms of being to which access is denied the sight and sense of common men. But always, when he asked if, having reached these exalted states, he were then safe for evermore from disease and decay and death, he was told that the question he asked was a foolish question; for none, not even the highest Gods, were safe forever from the law of change that rules the universe of beings—that soon or late all, even the most highly placed, must leave their lofty thrones.

Then once more the Prince was exceeding sorrowful and, turning his back upon all his masters, he made up his mind to try of himself to find a way of escape from the three great ills that poison human life; for seemingly in all the world there was none that knew and could show him that way.

Now it was a common belief in India at that time, as it has been a common belief in many other lands since then, that happiness hereafter is to be purchased at the price of unhappiness here—that the unhappier a man makes himself now, the happier does he make

himself in the future. And the Prince Siddhattha—for that was his name—did even as others did. In the intensity of his eagerness and determination to find the thing he sought, he subjected his body to every hardship and severity, even surpassing those practised by the greatest and most renowned ascetics of his day.

He lived upon what he received from seven givers during his begging round, then upon what he received from six, then upon what he got from five, from four, three, two, until finally he ate each day only what was given him by one giver. He partook only of seven handfuls of food for his day's nourishment, and one by one reduced their number until his daily portion consisted of but one handful of food. He ate only once in two days, then only once in three days, then once in four, five, six days, increasing the period of his abstinence by one day, until at length he was tasting food but once in fourteen days. He observed vows to live solely on what he could find growing wild in wood and field—grasses, herbs, mushrooms, roots, and fruits that had fallen from the trees. For covering to his body he wore only rags picked up at places of burial or upon rubbish heaps, plaited straw, the bark of trees and, at last, nothing but a horse's tail or an owl's wing to conceal his nakedness. When he lay down to rest, he did so only upon a bed of thorns. He practised the practice of loneliness in such wise that whenever in his wanderings in field or

forest he caught sight of a human being, a herdsman or a forester or such like, he immediately fled away lest he should look upon them or they upon him. And when the winter season set in, he spent the nights in an open clearing that he might suffer all the keenness of the cold ; and by day he couched in a dense thicket that he might not taste the comfort of the good warm sunshine. He lived solely on jujube fruit, eating a measured quantity each day, and gradually decreasing his portion until he was living on but one jujube fruit a day. With beans, with sesamum seed, with rice, he did the same, reducing the quantity consumed until at last he ate but one bean, one sesamum seed, one grain of rice for all his daily food. And by reason of these privations he came to be extraordinarily lean and dried up in body—a living skeleton; and his face, that once had shone as gold, was now so sadly marred that those who saw him scarce could say what was its hue, whether black or blue, or like to the colour of a fish. And, as if it were not enough thus to pang the body, he also put his mind to the torture. For upon the bodeful nights of the new and the full moon, and the quarter of the waxing and of the waning moons, he went to places of evil omen, spots that all men shunned in terror—graveyards, haunted groves, and dark gloomy forests ; and there, by sheer force of will he compelled himself to stay, all alone, while first one sound and then another broke the eerie stillness, sending through all his frame a shiver of fear ; yet did he

not leave these haunts of horror and affright until he had thoroughly controlled and mastered his fear, facing the terror of the place, lying down and standing up, sitting still and walking back and forth.

In this and similar fashion did the lean and worn ascetic who had been a Prince, practise all manner of austerities until he became quite famous throughout the land; and many came and took him for their teacher, considering that one who so mightily mortified mind and body alike for a surety must have gained access to a knowledge and insight far surpassing those of other common ascetics. But it was not so. To his great disappointment the erstwhile Prince perforce had to acknowledge to himself that after all his penances he was no nearer to the goal of his search than he was at the beginning. The answer to the question how man might escape disease and decay and death, was as far away as ever. Nay, if anything, he found that it was further away; for, with a body wasted and weakened with much fasting, the mind linked to it had become quite unable to bear the burden of continued meditation.

And so, having tried asceticism and its practices to the utmost limit, and found them utterly useless to help him to his end, the Prince-ascetic now cast them behind him for ever. From this time forward he ate a sufficiency of food of the kind appropriate to maintain his body in health and strength; and as, along with his body, his mind regained its former

vigour, day and night he pondered more and more deeply, day and night more and more resolutely meditated upon the problem he had set himself to solve, wandering on through the land of Magadha, in outward appearance a religious mendicant like any other religious mendicant of his day and time, but bent upon quite another end than they—resolved upon nothing less than the finding out by unremitting mental effort the complete and final ending of all ill.

At length in the course of his wanderings he came to a bright, broad, clear river, with a pleasant cool grove of trees near by, and fields and meadows all about where herdsmen grazed their cattle. "This is a good spot," he said to himself, "for one desirous of living the life of a strenuous seeker. Here will I stay."

And there for many days he abode beside the broad-flowing stream of the Neranjara river, and day after day saw the cattle cross by the ford to the further side where a little white village shone in the sunlight, thinking all the while how it might be possible for him and for all men to cross the great flood of Ill and win to Final Surety. And by night, when the business of the day was done, and herdsmen and flocks had all gone home to rest, and through the branches of the great fig-tree over his head the far-off stars looked down upon him, he wondered when he should find the way that led from the hot fever

of life to the coolness and calm of the Peace Unending. And anew he sunk himself in profound meditation, seeking, still seeking that way.

Then, one great night—great for him, great for all the millions of earth's habitants who since have learned from him—he found that which he sought, came to the end of his long course of painful toil and labour. Gathering together all his strength for one last effort of mind and will, he finally clove asunder the veil of ignorance that so long had blinded his eyes. The night of darkness was forever past: the day, the light was come. No longer did he dream the sad, mad dreams of Nescience, of Unknowingness. He was awake with the incomparably Perfect Awakening. He was become a Supremely Awakened One; for now he saw clearly, unmistakably, beyond all further need of search, the Four Great Verities, the Four Noble Truths that within their compass, as within four mighty walls, embrace and contain all that man needs to know for his abiding happiness. He saw the Noble Truth that here veritably is Ill, the Noble Truth that there is veritably a Cause of Ill, the Noble Truth that there is veritably a Ceasing of Ill, and—Noblest Truth of all—that there is veritably a Way whereby all Ill may be brought to an end for evermore.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH

THE first of the Four Noble Truths, of the Four Supreme Verities enunciated by the Buḍḍha at the close of His great night of effort under the Boḍhi tree, was the truth of Ill, a truth to which He gave expression in the brief formula :

Idaṅ pi Dukkha—Here verily is Ill.

In a sense it may be said that He attained to the perception of this Truth long before the great night at Uruvela ; it may be said that it was precisely the perception of this Truth which caused Him to fare forth upon the quest that ultimated in His becoming One Awakened. But, strictly speaking, that first sight of the Truth of Ill was only a partial one : it was merely pain and distress *felt* and, along with that, an equally keenly felt need of finding the means of deliverance from pain and distress. Under the Boḍhi tree, however, that first recognition of existent Ill was extended until it became pain and distress *understood*, to which understanding was successively

added an equally clear and perfect understanding of their arising and of their cessation.

The curt simplicity of the phrase in which this first of the Four Noble Truths is set forth, ought not to be allowed to mislead us as to its scope and general comprehensiveness. The words, "Here verily is Ill," do not mean: There are some things here that are ill, while there are others that may be well. They do not mean: Here in this world some things give rise to pain and distress among others that may be productive of real and lasting delight. The phrase, "Here verily is Ill," means: This world here in its entirety is Dukkha, is Ill. It is wholly and completely an Ill to be here in this world. It is not well to be here; there is that which is better; there is the Beyond-the-world.

The fact that to be here is wholly an Ill, that this world is not at all a satisfactory place to inhabit, very effectually conceals itself from the ordinary man. It lies hidden behind a number of appearances and events that to his usually self-centred consciousness seem so convincingly to prove the contrary that, when his attention is first directed to it, he is apt to resent the unwelcome intrusion upon his customary comfortable view of things, and to denounce the intruder as a kill-joy, a croaker, a pessimist. This, however, is entirely to mistake the scope and meaning of the First Noble Truth. Pessimism or croaking is an attitude of mind towards a certain fact or

certain facts; but the first of the Four Noble Truths is the simple statement of a fact—that and nothing more. And the fact to which the Buddha calls attention when he says "*Idaṅ pi Dukkha*"—"Here verily is Ill"—is that, whatever may be the pleasure and delight that life here for a time may afford, at length that pleasure or delight comes to an end, and in its place arrive unease, dissatisfaction, weariness, pain, and suffering, for the one comprehensive word Dukkha may be translated by any or all of these terms.

"*Sabbe Sankhara anicca*"—"All things are impermanent"—said the Awakened One as He lay on His couch dying, in these three words summing up all that He had taught, throughout his whole life, concerning the nature of the world; and the First Noble Truth is only a variation of this succinct utterance, the application of this truth concerning the house of nature to man the inmate of the house. All is impermanent; therefore to man all is a source of suffering. All is impermanent; therefore it is ill to be here: it is not well.

All is transient, subject to change; therefore Body is Dukkha, Body is an Ill. For, however well it may be with one's body for the moment, at every instant it stands liable to fall a prey to pain and suffering. Weapons can wound and maim it, harsh shocks crush its delicate members, fire scorch and wither it, water drown it, rude airs blast it, while diseases of every kind lie ever in wait for an opportunity to seize upon it and lay it low. And if it should escape all

that threatens it from these quarters at the hands of remorseless mutability, yet can it not escape decay and death. These, with the steady, unrelenting march of time, come upon it ineludibly. The stoutest and strongest that ever walked the earth and defied all upon it, at last must bow the knee, and own themselves outmastered. Cunning of hand and keenness of eye and subtlety of brain are, little by little, beyond all remedy, filched away by the nibbling, gnawing teeth of the black and the white mice of the nights and days in ceaseless procession; until at length, inevitably, the body drops out of sight and memory into the black gulf of death.

Sensation also is Dukkha, is an ill thing. For to all men pleasurable sensation is that which they desire, and unpleasurable sensation that which they would fain forever avoid. But, in the tide of changing circumstance, who can be assured that only what he desires of pleasurable shall come to him, and that that which he does not desire of unpleasurable shall keep far from him? Nay, each man knows that, despite all his wishes, again and again, that which he loathes will be forced upon him, that which he loves taken from him, and that which he most ardently desires withheld from him; his most anxious appeals to have it otherwise availing naught to change the issue. And even when that which he desires of pleasurable feeling is granted him in abundance, and he drinks of pleasure from full overflowing cup, it is only to find in every instance

that pleasure too long tasted turns to displeasure, gives place to the weariness of satiety. He finds that pleasure no longer pleases, that it has turned to pain. Thus, in its every phase, sensation is also an Ill.

The remaining elements in the constitution of a being —Perception, Mental Functioning, and Consciousness —each of these, too, is an ill thing; for, like sensation, they also, all three, lie at the mercy of mutation; along with sensation, they too are the sport and plaything of impermanence. Swept along in its ever-changing stream, none has power to say: "Let what I perceive, let what I hold in mind, let what I am conscious of, be thus and not so!" Upon perception and mind and consciousness the undesired is forced; from them the desired is whirled away, or, as may very well be, is never brought them at all. And this inability to control these aspects of our being, this powerlessness to make them what one would have them be—this makes it that they are Ills, things that are not well.

Now it goes without saying that each man's knowledge of the nature of the world is derived in the first instance from his own individual experience of it. Hence it may well seem justifiable for some whose lives thus far have been free from any great trouble of body or mind, and who, so far as they can see, have no reason to look forward to anything but a gentle and painless descent toward old age and death—it may seem justifiable, in such sons of happy circumstance as

these, to say that these statements of the Buḍḍha concerning the body and the other constituents of man's being are exaggerated to the point of untruth. But it is to be remembered that when the Buḍḍha says that Body is Ill, He does not in the least mean to say that every single and particular instance of bodily existence is a grievous thing; on the face of it anyone can see that such a dictum would only be partially true. The *logion*, "Body is Ill," refers to body in general, to body as a whole, to body wheresoever it is found, in all its manifestations everywhere and in all times, past, present and future. "Body is an Ill" means that the fact that there is such a thing in existence as body is ill, not well; and, for the proof of this, one is asked to direct one's gaze over the entire field of all instances of the existence of body.

The individual who, by reason of the fairly happy life which he has so far enjoyed in his present body, resents as unnecessarily gloomy the Buḍḍha's word about body and the rest being Ills, is asked for a moment to take his eyes off the particular body he at present calls his own, and in imagination to cast a glance backward over all the long past in which he has occupied body after body in innumerable succession. And in the light of that vision then to consider if it be not true that Body is an Ill; for there he will see, in that long course of lives, how he has lost more blood than all the rivers of earth hold of water, has shed more tears of grief and sorrow than

all the waters of the Four Great Seas. To take such a backward glance, only in imagination, is to conjure up a picture of sufficient power to impress even the dullest. But to behold all the long line of livings and dyings in their every detail—such vision mercifully is denied men until they have grown strong enough to bear the sight without harm; because, but for the "draught of Lethe" drunk at birth which brings forgetfulness of all that has gone before, the greater mass of men would be too much appalled, too crushed in spirit, at the scene that would open before them, to live their present lives to any purpose.

But, turning aside from the contemplation of one's own experience of body in past lives, which in the eyes of some may seem a contemplation of the purely hypothetical and fanciful; turning from this, as it might be called, longitudinal aspect of life in body, and directing one's attention upon what it may be permissible to designate as a lateral view of life in body, then, as one looks upon these other bodies not our own, but existing simultaneously with it, a similar picture of the ill of body presents itself. It is a habit with mankind in general—and perhaps a necessary habit if it is to continue its species and perform all the labours which the perpetuation of the species necessitates, a habit for the most part unconscious, a kind of instinct—to turn its eyes away from a too long or too close contemplation of the ills of life as these present themselves in the aggregate of all

contemporaneous lives. But if once a man, for a moment breaking loose from the bonds of instinct, does fix his mind intently upon the picture of life as a whole, with honest determination to see it just as it is, without any regard to his own feelings or wishes in the matter, then the perfect verity of the first of the Four Noble Truths cannot but press itself upon him with overwhelming, all-convincing force. For, albeit his own particular specimen of body may be hale and well at the moment, he will see as he looks around him a whole host of bodies that are very far indeed from being so, that are, on the contrary, constant sources of wearying pain and frequently of acutest agony. A day spent with a doctor friend in any of the great hospitals of a capital city, a frank and intimate conversation about his profession with a specialist in any bodily disease, will leave a man with scarcely a doubt as to the truth of the Buḍḍha's dictum that Body is an ill thing.

Again, if an individual has enjoyed passably good fortune all his present life, has received a comfortable share of the good things the world has to give; if his pleasures have been many, and his mind undistressed and well at ease throughout most of his days; he need only take an honest, open-eyed look about him in order to see that there are many, nay, countless thousands, to whom, from the cradle to the grave most of the good things of life are denied, and the few that are won, are won only at the cost of much

labour and toil. In countless instances he will see that all the labour of body and mind expended only suffices to win the means of mere existence, the scant pleasures that are tasted being few and far between. It is only the very limited minority of earth's denizens who can say that ease and comfort of body and mind have been theirs all through life; and many of these too, when questioned, are forced to confess that at times they have had to pay for their secured position in moments of intense solicitude and anxiety lest they should lose that which they had gained. A frank envisagement of life just as it is, will show anyone not obstinately resolved upon holding the contrary view, that the Buḍḍha is only stating the sober truth when He says that Body, Sensation, Perception, Mental Functioning and Consciousness are, each and all of them, ill things.

Again, many will be inclined to say such a cheerless view of things is simple pessimism; but once more it must be answered that this is not so. Pessimism is an attitude of mind toward a fact, and what the Buḍḍha does in the first of the Four Noble Truths is only to call attention to a fact, not a word being said to prevent one from adopting whatever attitude he chooses toward that fact. But in view of the Buḍḍha's further achievements on the great night at Uruvela—His discovery of the Cause of Ill and His discovery of its Cure—that attitude, for a man who puts any kind of confidence in the

Buḍḍha's statements, becomes anything but a pessimistic, anything but a gloomy one. For he learns from the Awakened One that the Ill is not hopeless, not in the least incurable, but that there is sure and certain deliverance from it; hence, as he looks out upon the mass of suffering men, his fellow-prisoners in the house of sentient life, his prevailing feeling is one of pity and compassion, never of melancholy. For though they suffer, these hosts of men, and for the most part know not why—know not that their sufferings are of their own procuring—yet is their painful case no irremediable one. Some day, in this or in some future life, they shall hear the word of a Buḍḍha or of one who has learnt of a Buḍḍha—for even to this end do the Buḍḍhas appear in the world, each one after the other—and through that hearing, coming to an understanding of the why and wherefore of suffering, they shall begin to tread the path that leads away from it. From his meditation upon the Noble Truth of Ill the Buḍḍhist rises in no mood of hopeless gloom, in no attitude of cheerless despondency, but with heart resolute to make his dwelling henceforth in the Four Highest Best Abodes—the High Abode of Boundless Loving-kindness towards all that lives, the High Abode of Joying with them in all their joys, the High Abode of Compassion for them in all their sorrows, and the High Abode of Serene Even-mindedness in the thought that there is a sure and certain ending of all Sorrow—the great and glorious ending of Nibbāna.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH

FEW things are more beautiful to behold than the rows of lighted Sabbath candles which pious hands oft-times place around the sacred Bodhi tree, with here and there a few sprinkled among the lower branches of its tall dome of foliage, upon some still and windless night. The steady, unmoving flames—so steady, so unmoving, that they seem veritable solid forms, of some strangely resplendent substance—throw a wondrous yellow glow into the surrounding darkness, fashioning therein a little isle of amber splendour that only seems the more splendid by contrast with the encompassing world of shadow. To a child not yet come to years of discretion, the sight is so entrancing that its little heart may well be taken with such longing for the pretty flames the instant they come in view, that, unless prevented from doing so, it will put forth its hands and try to seize the alluring object. And if, eluding the vigilance of better-instructed elders, it does succeed in getting at the golden flames and clutches at them with its tiny fingers, what bitter smarts, what rending pangs follow!

Then it finds out, only too late to save the woe, that, for all their brave looks, the enchanting things before its eyes possess no solid substance by which they can be held, and that they give hurt, and cruel hurt, to anyone who tries to hold them.

In some such way as this it is with those other flames, the sights and sounds and forms of sense that make up for us this so lovely-seeming world. Harmless and beautiful these appear to be and, indeed, for long might so remain, did we but keep them at due distance, did we but hold our hearts from going out towards them with desire and longing to possess, did we but stay our hands from the attempt to have and hold them for our very own. But just as soon as this desire and longing arise, just as soon arise pains and distresses manifold. The flames of life have no solid substance to offer to the hands that fain would seize them; for all reward of such effort, they only scorch and burn. The promise of delight they gave turns out to be a bitter and cruel delusion; and the knowledge is forced upon us that what seemed a sure and certain source of pleasure, is veritably a fount of pain; we find that every misery that afflicts us, traced to its deepest root, springs just from this one thing—craving to have and hold and possess.

And there under the Bodhi tree, what time the ardent searcher strove to pierce yet further the veil of unknowingness that wraps all beings round, even

this was the knowledge to which He won as the second outcome of His night of labour, proclaiming it afterwards to all men as the Second Noble Truth of the Cause of Ill.

For the Buḍḍha did not *invent* the truths He taught. The truths by Him made known that form the four foundation stones of His Ḍhamma, are not the mere product of an exceptionally able and active cogitative faculty. The Lord Buḍḍha was not a more than usually skilful deviser of a "system". Systems there were many and to spare in the India of His day, each of them only another tangle and snare, a puppet-show and weary waste of words. He saw no need to add to their number; moreover, views for Him had long since ceased to hold aught of even the slightest interest. All His aim and effort were directed simply and solely towards getting at the facts of life, towards coming to see things as they really are. Pursuing that aim, making that effort, He saw first that existence is an ill. That clearly seen, His next step was to find out, if He might, the cause of the ill; and still keeping before Him, still relentlessly interrogating the facts, He found that cause to lie in the craving thirst for the things of sense which overmasters and leads captive the hearts of men—of all men save the Wise and those who have learned of the Wise.

Later on, when the great night of labour was past and He, victorious, had attained to Full Enlightenment,

He set forth at length the nature of that same fire of craving that gives rise to all woe, in a discourse which, on that account, is called the "Fire Discourse". "All things," He there declares, "all things are afire. And what are all those things that are afire? Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are afire. And that which is perceived by each and all of these: sights, sounds, odours, tastes, contacts, and ideas—these too are afire. And the consciousness and the impressions received of sights and sounds, odours and tastes, contacts and ideas—these also are afire. And all feelings, whether pleasant feelings or unpleasant feelings, or feelings neither pleasant nor unpleasant, that come to be through the afore-mentioned impressions—afire are all these also. And wherewithal are they afire? They are afire with the fire of craving and hate and delusion, with the fire of birth and decay and death, with suffering and sorrowing, with grief and despair are all these afire."

Although the fire of craving manifests itself in a myriad varied forms, there are three main divisions under which all these forms may be classified, of which the first and most arresting is the simple thirst of the senses for immediate and unstinted satisfaction through the objects corresponding to them—sensuality in its crudest, baldest, least dissembled guise.

It is under the influence of this particular form of craving that men commit all imaginable misdeeds, and then perforce have to endure the suffering that

follows ineluctably upon all misdoing. To secure the object that one or other of their senses craves, men become murderers and take the life of a fellow man. Or if not blinded into taking life, yet under the sway of their greedy desires, by main force they wrest from others that which belongs to them. Or, consumed with the hot lust of the flesh and the wild hunger of the eyes, they carry off maidens from their lawful guardians, entice and draw away from their husbands married women, despoil the expectant bridegroom of his bride, only that they may gratify their own inordinate craving. Or, dominated by greed of gain, they lie and shuffle and prevaricate, seeking thereby to win some advantage great or small in trafficking. Or they repudiate engagements solemnly entered upon, breaking their plighted word, or perjure themselves and bear false witness before the ministers of the law. Or with foolhardy recklessness they fall to drinking strong drinks, or partaking of noxious drugs that steal their brains away from them so that they no longer know what they are about; and, while thus void of wit, do the deeds of killers and robbers and libertines and liars, do all manner of evil deeds that in their sober senses they had never thought to do. Then the officers of the law come and take them off to the prison-house, and they are judged for the deeds that they have done while bond-slaves to their cravings, and condemned to bitter punishment. And the sorrows they then endure, and the distresses their

fellow men have suffered at their hands—alike have sprung from the craving desire which they have allowed to overcome them. So do they both suffer and cause suffering, and only because of craving.

Again, impelled thereto by their cravings for the lands and wealth of others, men mass themselves into great armies and fling themselves upon trooped masses of other men who have banded themselves together to defend their possessions. In panoply of war, armed with many a death-dealing weapon, they dash one against the other, host engaging host in battle array. And the bright swords flash, and the swift bullets fly. And heads are gashed, limbs torn and bodies mangled, and hundreds and thousands come by death and deadly hurt. And for long the widow and the orphan, the brotherless and the sonless, weep and mourn for those that will never return to them. Thus again comes suffering; and solely by reason of the blind and monstrous craving for the things of sense that rules tyrannically the infatuate minds of men.

But craving that is suffering's source may assume another and less obvious shape than the bald, brute desire for one or other of the satisfactions of sense; it may manifest itself simply as an ardent desire not to cease—an eager hope and longing still to remain within reach of sense-satisfaction in some one or other form. Craving, in this aspect, does not so

clearly and unmistakably lead to suffering as in its ruder, coarser guise. Here it does not seek its own gratification with no regard to the hurt and harm it inflicts upon others. Its only wish is never to be removed where such gratification shall be impossible. Its desire is ever to abide in some region of the familiar and accustomed, in some realm of the only life it knows or cares to know—the life of the senses and that which pertains thereto. It dreads with a great dread the ceasing of what it knows as life, and desperately hopes and desires still to go on and abide in this, the one state of being it knows, for ever and ever without end.

Yet in this much altered form, no less than in the other, craving reveals itself as the root of suffering. For desire, earnest and prolonged, is that which in the universe eventually brings about its own fulfilment; and this desire for continued life in the form already known, already experienced—life in a world of sense—makes it to be that life ever-renewed springs up again and again in the sensuous world as long as the desire endures. Again and again the being that *is* this desire objectified returns to the scene of suffering and distress that is the world of man, bound fast to the whirling, never-resting wheel of Samsara by his own thirst for continued existence; and, thither come, of necessity must participate in the pain-fraught experience of all that inhabit such a world.

In yet a third form does craving make its presence known. Seeking no gross, immediate delight in the world of sense enjoyments, nor yet an endless continuance of the possibilities such a world affords, it only aims to make the most of what may still be tasted through the avenues of sight and sound and smell and taste and touch, and of the mind that shares in each, before all the sights of earth are quenched in darkness, and all most pleasing sounds stricken dumb for ever. It cherishes no hope of aught beyond this present flitting span of life, holds no belief in any fruit of deed beyond the black gate of death. It deliberately limits its gaze to what is to be seen and known by the present living eye and brain, and holds belief in anything that that gaze does not reveal as vanity and delusion. The varied shows the world of sense provides between the two doors of birth and death are all it takes account of. When these are ended, so it deems, there is no more to care for. And so it seeks to taste in fullest, acutest measure all that the world of sense can furnish of rich and rare sensation while such sensation may be; yet always in such wise that it does not defeat its own end by a too greedy clutching at delight, whereby its power to taste of more might be impaired. By a carefully regulated indulgence, each faculty of sense is to be made to yield its fullest, richest store of pleasure and delight, before the darkness of death descends and all possibility of further indulgence is ended for ever.

But even this form of craving, well considered and controlled as it is in its modes of manifestation, does not escape the doom of pain. The flames of sense, whether rudely grasped at by greedy, thoughtless fingers, or heedfully approached and felt, burn all alike that seek to seize them, whether wise or foolish. The craving for the things of sense is as a fire that only grows the hotter for every piece of fuel that is added to it. Each new indulgence in delight, however nicely calculated, binds man in a closer, firmer bond; and then comes death, and with cruel remorseless wrench breaks asunder all the dear ties of fondness, and pain and grief force their way into the portals so carefully guarded, and will not be denied. In this last guise, desire is like the thirst which a ship-wrecked mariner on a raft in mid-ocean might seek to assuage by cautious sips at the salty element all about him; with each fresh sip his thirst only grows the greater. Even so is it with the man who sets his affections on sense-delights in any measure whatsoever. Tasting of them, he more and more desires to have and hold them!; and with increasing dread—as how can he else?—he beholds the slow, remorseless coming of a day that will wrest them all away from him. But the callous years care nothing for his dread; they still flow on and do their never-ending work. The gnawing worm of decay eats hollow and yet more hollow every erstwhile goodly tree in the garden of his pleasure. And when at length the chill,

cold wind of death blows fell upon them and lays all upon the ground, it finds the shivering owner still hungry and thirsty as ever after their pleasing fruit —a most unhappy wretch, confronted by what he deems the end of all.

Such is craving in its three great leading forms, and such the ill that comes to be by reason of this threefold craving; for, even as made known by the Buḍḍha in His Second Noble Truth: "The cause of ill is that craving which gives rise to rebirth, and, bound up with greed for pleasure, now here, now there, seeks ever fresh delight. It is sensual craving, the craving for individual existence, the craving for temporal happiness."

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH

It is an old and trite, but none the less true, saying that if causes be removed their effects also must cease. Craving, then, having been seen to be the cause of Ill, it needs only that Craving be removed for the effect, *viz.*, Ill, also to come to an end. It is precisely this obvious consequence which forms the substance of the third of the Four Noble Truths made known by the Buḍḍha, a consequence that is set forth in these words: "In respect of this same Craving—severance and ceasing utter and complete, abandonment, rejection, freedom, dissociation: this is what is called the Noble Truth of the Ceasing of Ill." Unable to secure for himself that which he craves; or, having secured it, to keep hold of it; or having had thrust upon him that which he does not crave at all, but contrariwise loathes—the son of earth is plunged into unhappiness and wretchedness. From this unhappiness, from this wretchedness, there can come no relief save when the cravings and desires

that are their cause are given up, entirely abandoned. Once a man has utterly ceased from the longing to have and to hold for himself this or the other object belonging to the world of sense, whatever that object may be, he has covered as with impenetrable armour the one weak spot where the chance and change of a fugitive world can come at him to do him hurt: he has dried up the fell stream of ill at its very source, so that no more forever can he be whelmed beneath its bitter waves. For in his desire for and longing to possess these objects of sense, and in this alone, resides all the power they possess to hurt him. Of themselves they can never cause him pain. Only when his craving for them turns them for him into objects that promise pleasure, do they assume the character of what may be a source of pain simply through their denying him the pleasure he had hoped they might yield. Such is the fact of life that finds its due expression in the Third Noble Truth.

But how can man ever come to cease from this craving desire that is of the very essence of his nature as a dweller in the kāma-loka? Each and every activity of his life in the world of sense—for this very reason called the *desire-world*—is the direct expression of his endeavour to satisfy desire for one or other of the things it offers. Moreover, his simple existence as an individualised entity is no more than the concrete result of his desire to exist. To cease wholly and completely from desiring is for him no-

other than to cease from existence; and to call on him to give up desire would be very much the same as to ask him to commit suicide. How then can man be moved to the doing of such a thing? How brought to let go the lust of living and so cease from life, as a light expires when the oil wherewith its wick is fed comes to an end?

There are two ways, and two ways only, in which such a thing as this may be brought about. On the one hand, by a prodigious effort of will—yet not so prodigious but that many have been able to make it—it is possible so to suppress and crush down by main force every outgoing motion of desire towards external objects, that what might be called a cataleptic condition of the desire-tendencies is brought about, which is not permanent indeed, yet may well continue for ages and ages, so that during all that time such a conflux of desire-tendencies may never once indue corporeal form in any world of sense. At length, however, the force of the original impulse that produced such a cataleptic condition must become exhausted, whereupon the tendencies in question must again take visible embodiment and declare themselves in all their old-time vigour. This method of subduing desire—to call it such—despite the purely temporary nature of its effectiveness, very largely was and is the method pursued in India by a numerous class of *Yogis*—a method pursued in the India in which the Buddha lived and moved, as in

the India of to-day. On the other hand, by the steady and prolonged contemplation of the objects that excite his desire, with the one determined intent of arriving at a comprehension of their true nature, a man at length may come to such a clear, convincing vision of their essential transitoriness, pain-engendering potentialities, and emptiness of any basic substance, that *of itself* his desire will turn away from them and seek them no more. The former method of procedure is harsh, violent, unnatural; the latter is mild, gentle, rational. The former is painful, ignoble, hurtful; the latter painless, elevating, helpful. The former is the method of asceticism; the latter that of the Noble Eightfold Path, that taught by the Lion of the Sakyas.

And just at this point care must be taken to guard against a grave error that is only too likely to arise. It might be thought that the clear perception that every object of sense is transient, pain-fraught and unsubstantial, furnishes all the warrant necessary for living a life of idle and supine indifference; it might be imagined that here is supplied ample grounds for letting the hours go by, unheeding and unremorseful of their going, putting forth no stroke of effort after anything, as though in some way all were nothing but a dream.

Now it may be granted that after a fashion the world and the things of the world are illusion, mirage; but man's position in that world is anything but an

illusion for him, anything but a mirage : it is a very stern affair. And the Four Noble Truths that form the foundation stones of the Buḍḍha's entire Teaching are naught but an urgent summons to men to give swift and careful heed to this stern business, to the serious position in which they find themselves, and without further delay to take all necessary steps to extricate themselves from it. To view these Four Truths in any other light is to mistake the entire purport and meaning of the Buḍḍha's message to mankind. The Truth which announces that suffering ceases with the Ceasing of Craving is no call to men to fall back into a life of sloth and torpor, for these are the very things expressly mentioned as obstacles upon the Buḍḍhist's path to Deliverance. On the contrary, this Third Noble Truth is a direct call, a spur, an incitement to men, once they have perceived the pitiful and deceitful nature of the shows of the world that so allure them to their hurt, to live a life of the most strenuous endeavour, to the end that Craving may cease and that they may win that which is beyond the reach of impermanence and pain. A man who has been told that the house in which he sits is on fire, does not thereupon stretch himself out at full length on a couch with the conviction that this is the proper course to pursue when one finds oneself in a burning house. Far from that, he jumps at once to his feet and with all the speed he can command makes for the door that leads out of the house, never

once pausing or looking back until he has reached the safety of the open air. If he did not do this, we should rightly suspect that he had not properly heard those who had informed him of the outbreak of fire, or else that he was not in full possession of his senses.

Much the same is it with his house of sentient life, and men the dwellers therein. This house is on fire with the threefold fires of Craving and Hate and Delusion. So, learning from a Buḍḍha or from one who has learned it from a Buḍḍha, the son of earth can no longer sit or stand, much less lie down, at ease. Henceforth he can do but one thing only—press forward with all swiftness upon the Path that leads to escape from his fiery prison. Henceforth he must be continually on the alert to avoid every obstacle that would detain him within its walls of pain. Henceforth he feels bound to make use of every opportunity to take a longer and ever longer stride towards the goal of deliverance, and never to slacken in his efforts until he has actually reached it, actually left behind him the realm of the transient, the painful and the unsubstantial, and attained to the realm of the changeless, the sorrow-free, the abiding. If he behaves otherwise, then, despite all he may say to the contrary, only one conclusion can be drawn from his conduct—that he has not properly comprehended the message of the Buḍḍha. He may indeed have that message frequently upon his lips. He may speak much about the transiency and painfulness and

unsubstantiality of the world; but if he does not at the same time set himself to travel forward and make some progress upon the Path which the Buḍḍha taught leads away from such an unsatisfactory state of things towards one that is better, then we are justified in saying that such a man is deceiving himself. We are justified in saying that he has not really comprehended the meaning of the teaching concerning Anicca, Dukkha, and Anatta—that he has no real apprehension of the Impermanence, Suffering, and Emptiness of Things; else he could do no other than exert himself forthwith to place himself beyond their reach. Perceiving the unsatisfying nature of the world, he could not possibly remain in sloth and idleness: he could not lie back in idle ease. Henceforth his life could be nothing but one long endeavour, never wavering, never slackening till crowned with fullest success.

To cease from Craving, then, while it involves the removal of the motives that usually impel men to activity, as we have seen, by no means imports the cessation of all activity. The old motives truly have disappeared, but only that they may give place to others, new but equally potent to move to action. There is now greater call than ever for the display of energy, but it is energy directed into an altogether new channel. The old aim was for satisfaction through possession of the desired object, a satisfaction, however, which by the very nature of its object was forever doomed to disappointment. The

deepest possible draughts of the drink it craved could never appease its thirst. Growing ever more thirsty with each fresh draught taken, as one who seeks to slake his thirst by drinking of the salt waters of the sea, the man who aims to secure satisfaction through the pleasures of the senses finds all his efforts frustrated and brought to naught in the most cruel manner. He finds himself pursuing a goal that retreats continually before him as fast as he seeks to approach it. The new aim, on the contrary, in impelling to greater exertions, has before it the prospect of an incomparably superior issue; it directs to a sure and certain goal that every day's—yea, every hour's—exertion infallibly brings nearer and nearer. The difference is that between a pictured and a real banquet, between a flickering shadow and a solid substance. Hence, of these two aims—the aim to secure the satisfaction of the senses, and the aim to attain to the constant, the unchanging, the sorrowless—the latter beyond all comparison is the more rational and promising, by far the better furnished with a motive to ceaseless activity for him who really understands.

And the same may be said of the joys that constitute the accompaniment of these two different aims.

"Two joys there be," says a passage in one of the Suttas, "the joy of enjoyment and the joy of renunciation; but of these two joys, the superior is the joy of renunciation. Two joys there be—worldly

joy and unworldly joy; but of these two joys, the superior is unworldly joy." So superior, indeed, is the latter by contrast with its opposite, that the former seems scarcely to deserve the name of joy at all, so very short-lived is each of its elements, so empty are they of solid, abiding content, so certain to end in disappointment and pain. Were this all the joy that mortals might know—to pluck the flowers of sense-delight, and then look on the while they fade and wither in their hands—wailing and moaning might well be the sole language befitting human lips, sackcloth and ashes mankind's one proper wear, and blackest pessimism its only true philosophy.

But there is another joy mankind may taste, better and nobler far than that—the joy that is not of the world, the joy of renunciation. The man who sets his foot upon this path of renunciation, this path whose end is the Beyond-the-world, leaves nothing behind him worth a single sigh of regret, nothing worth one least cloud of sadness. Instead he claims, and is about to make good his claim, a happiness that does not decay, that can never grow less, but must continue more and more to increase with the passage of each new day of endeavour—each new day that brings him closer and yet more close to the goal he has set before him, the goal of freedom from all that change and chance can ever compass.

"Of those that live happily in the world, I also am one," the Buddha once declared; and every faithful

follower of the path He has pointed out may say the same in all sincerity of heart, in spite of anything that may happen as the passing distress of the moment. For he is learning to place himself beyond the treacherous power of the pleasures of sense, guarding the gates of eye and ear and every other organ; whether those pleasures be present or absent, whether they come before him in their most alluring forms or whether they wholly desert him, either way he is learning to remain equally unmoved—unshaken in the strong fortress of his calm, as a rock is unmoved though all the winds of heaven blow upon it. His mind approaches steadfastness, a place of peace where never more can it be reached by any air of earth. Out of the realm of the born, the originated, the manifested, he aspires and labours towards the high goal of the unborn, the unoriginated, the unmanifested—the peace of the changeless Nibbāna. Ardently as the traveller across the desert anticipates and joys in the shadow and coolness of the green oasis he is approaching, with its well of sweet water and tall, fruit-bearing palms, so ardently does he who has fared forth upon the Path of the Noble, anticipate the joy of the day when he shall have done with the whirling of the wheel and come to rest—when he shall have reached the Ceasing of Suffering by the utter Ceasing of Craving.

CHAPTER V

THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH

THE fourth great verity to which He who was now the Awakened, the Buḍḍha, attained—the attaining whereof, indeed, made Him to be a Fully Awakened One—was the Truth of the Path. First, He had found that there was Ill; then He laid bare the source of that Ill; next, He proclaimed that there was a Ceasing of that Ill, to be compassed by the drying up of its source; all that remained for Him to do now was to declare the means by which that source might be stopped in its flow, and so all Ill brought to an utter end. "All that remained," we have said, but this "all that remained," as it was the last, so also was it by far the most important division of the achievement of the Blessed One; for it was that part which set the final crown upon His labours, lacking which they would have deserved as little attention as, and no more attention than, any other system of thought then or at any time since in vogue. As they stand by themselves with nothing further added, the first three

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truths are as barren as is any other piece of purely intellectual knowledge that has not yet been brought into practical, actual relation with the life of man; but when to their statement of what requires to be done, there is appended full directions as to how the necessary work may surely and certainly be accomplished, we have given us all the materials we have any right to ask for a philosophy, an ethics, a religion, or whatever else we choose to call a competent guide to man as to how he can best direct his life to most fruitful ends. And it is just such an addition that is furnished us in the Fourth Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the Ceasing of Ill, which thus becomes the final truth whose discovery and proclamation rounds off and completes the task of Him who had set out to find Enlightenment for Himself and for all mankind.

In this fact that the fourth and crowning truth that concluded the Buḍḍha's work is not the enunciation and detailed description of any *goal*, but simply and solely the indication and explanation of a *path* to a goal, we have the key-note to the entire teaching of the Buḍḍha—we have brought before us in clearest and most unmistakable fashion, the wholly *practical* nature of that Teaching. It is of the utmost importance that from the very outset one should clearly understand and take firm hold of this idea of the entirely practical, the almost anti-theoretical nature of the Ḍhamma of the Buḍḍha. If only one bears it

constantly in mind, one will never be puzzled for long by any seeming difficulty that may arise in one's further studies of the details of the Ḍhamma; reference back to this idea will speedily clear away all such difficulties as oftsoever as they may occur. But if we lose sight of the exclusively practical character of the Buḍḍha's Teaching—if we forget that it is "a raft meant for use, not meant for retention," or, worse still, if we have never rightly taken hold of such an idea at the commencement of our studies; then baffling difficulties will continually beset us, and sooner or later we shall come to some blank wall, so to speak, that will seem to shut off all further prospect, bar all further possibility of advance; even as it might be with a man who had lost his way, 'mid the streets of a great and unknown city, and should finally stray in the course of his fruitless wanderings into some blind alley with no visible outlet anywhere. There are a thousand and one questions the enquiring mind can ask concerning the world and life and destiny, and the possible answers are as many and as varied as the questions. But a path, just because it is a path, is something to be *trodden*, not something to be merely talked about, discussed, cogitated upon. One is putting a path to its single legitimate use then only when one *walks* it, not when one draws pictures of it. And so one is making right use of the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buḍḍha; one shows that one has rightly understood His Fourth Noble Truth of the Path when once for all

one abandons all questions as to the origins and endings of anything save of this one thing—Ill; and sets out practically to try to realise that Ending of Ill by humbly following the directions laid down in the Fourth Noble Truth. It is not by chance or oversight or any incapacity that the Fourth Noble Truth supplies no answer to the many questions the mind of man has excogitated and brooded over throughout its long history. It is of deliberate purpose that it passes them all by to do what is far better: to point out a sure and certain path, by the following of which a vantage ground at length will be reached whence all such questions will be plainly seen to need no answer, a position at last be attained where they will be found to have answered themselves in the demonstration of their own groundlessness.

If a man deep in a nightmare groans or cries aloud, troubled and tormented by some terrifying phantasm of sleep, we do not—supposing for the nonce such a thing to be possible—seek to soothe his trouble by giving him elaborate analyses and explanations of the nature of sleep-visions in general, and of the probable origin of his own in particular, in some indiscretion of diet or such like. Instead of this, we do something at once much more simple and effective—we wake the man up; then he perceives for himself the true nature of his trouble and stands in no need of any explanation of the same, however ngenious and learned such an explanation might be.

Even so is it with this nightmare of Avijja wherein immersed all men live their lives from the cradle to the grave—a nightmare, of whose constituent elements not the least vexatious and tormenting items are precisely those manifold queries and questions that so persistently rise and haunt the human mind, like ghosts that refuse to be laid, whenever that mind begins to exercise itself in any degree. But the Fourth Noble Truth contains no answer to any of these interrogations of the Avijja-laden intellect of man—is not intended to supply even the least hint at any such answer. All it does is to point out a way whereby the son of earth may wake up out of that nightmare of Avijja. Following that way to its end in Awakening, he then will see that all the things that perplexed and perturbed him so were of his own devising alone—phantoms begotten of his own disordered, Avijja-darkened brain, that now have disappeared and wholly ceased to be in the broad, bright daylight of Vijja, of True Knowing.

"But what precisely is this Awakening?" the curious mind will still incline to ask, intent as ever upon finding food for cogitation rather than grounds for action. "Is it not possible at all to supply, were it only a few, positive details as to its nature? Surely a teaching must be called incomplete, its foundations but ill laid, that does not furnish at least a little positive information, even if in briefest outline, concerning the nature of that to which it would direct our steps!"

To this question the simple answer is: such details, if given, would serve no *practical* purpose whatever, and practical purpose is the only purpose with which the Buddha has any concern in the whole matter. For suppose such details supplied, what would be the probable, the almost certain result? Men would sit down, carefully con them, turn them over and over, twist them this way and that out of mere curiosity to see how far they could be so twisted; and, after extracting the last ounce of intellectual enjoyment derivable from such mental gymnastics, would finally excogitate from them one more "system" to add to the many "systems" already in existence, thereby defeating the one and only object the Buddha had in mind in making known His Teaching—the getting men to *follow* His Path, and realise each for himself the end to which it leads. It is this *realisation*—"to be known by the wise, each for himself," as the Sutta says—that the Buddha sought to render accessible to men, and this alone; but in cogitation and speculation that great goal would inevitably recede further and further into the background of men's minds and at last be lost sight of altogether.

It is as if there were some men whose great and pressing need was to get away from the unhealthy and disease-ravaged city where they dwelt to another city free from unhealthiness and disease; and as if these men should insist before they left their old haunts of sickness and death that there should be given

them a map of the city of life and health to which they were being advised to go, with details of its various streets and buildings. Even though such a map were given them, and though they sat down and studied it so diligently as to imprint on their minds every feature of its topography, with all their study and learning they would still be no single inch nearer to that desired goal than they were at the beginning of their study; they would still be where they were before they had heard a single word about it—still in the midst of unhealth and disease, as far distant as ever from health and security. All their head-knowledge would not have done for them what only a few steps of their feet in the right direction would have done—brought them at least that much further from the undesirable, that much nearer to the desired.

Futility such as this the Buddha had no intention of fostering. He points out that the city where men dwell is no desirable residence. He points out that there is another that is free from all its drawbacks and discomforts and ills. He points out the road that leads from the former to the latter; and, having done this, considers that He has done all He need be asked to do for the welfare of the men in the plague-smitten city, that anything more than this is sheer waste of time and trouble.

He announces the existence of Ill—that is, of limitation and all that limitation connotes, in which

latter category the element that most insistently forces itself upon the attention of sentient creatures is suffering, discomfort, unease of every kind, physical and mental. Then He points out that there is such a thing as a Ceasing of this Ill, of this state of limitation, of conditionedness and all that goes along with it of pains and distresses of body and mind. And when, finally, He makes His Fourth Noble Truth simply the enunciation of the method whereby Ill, limitation, conditionedness, with all that these imply of pain and distress, may be brought to an end, utter and complete, He does amply all He can reasonably be asked to do from any practical point of view.

But even from a purely theoretical point of view, the demand to be given some positive data as to what supervenes when Ill is brought to an end, is one that has no solid foundation in sound logic. For the mind that makes this demand, as it does so, is functioning—since naught else is possible to it—under circumstances of limitation and conditionedness. From this it necessarily follows that every idea, every notion it might form or conceive from whatever might be told it concerning what ensues with the ending of Ill, perforce would be involved with, tainted by, that same limitation under which it performs all its functions, and so would not be any true idea of what then ensues, and in the very nature of the case never could be such. In addition to this, to ask positive information regarding what supervenes when Ill has

come to an end, is in effect to invite that lies should be told one. For words, however carefully chosen, can, after all, only convey what words have been devised to convey—namely, the things and ideas appertaining to the state of limitation and conditionedness that represents the normal life of mankind. With the best will in the world, every time we open our mouths to speak or take up pen to write, we do so to speak or to write of things lying within the circle of the limited and conditioned, even though we may imagine to ourselves that we are soaring away outside of and beyond that circle. The moment a positive idea is formulated in thought, expressed in words, that moment it becomes—let it be as sublimated and super-refined as we choose—an idea pertaining to the realm of the limited and conditioned. In the inevitable nature of things it is a representation of what lies within the confines of the limited, never of aught beyond or outside of these confines ; if it be put forward or through ignorance taken as representing the latter, it is an incorrect, a false, statement, let the terms in which it is couched be selected never so cunningly.

Hence it is only in accord with the laws of the most rigorous logic, of sound common sense, that the Buḍḍha maintains silence—" the noble silence of the wise "—upon what is *lokuttara*, upon what is beyond and outside of *loka*, the world of sensation, perception and consciousness. In negative terms only does He

allude to what lies beyond those boundaries; only in negative terms *can* He hint at what lies there—if even it be admissible to say that aught so "lies". Here incomparably the best speech is silence. That silence the Buḍḍha observed. But it is not the silence of ignorance: it is the silence of profound, of profoundest knowledge—of the knowledge that nothing can be said of that Beyond-the-world in the speech of this Within-the-world that will not in some way be false, misleading, untrue.

This much the man of thought will see and understand without further argument; but what of the plain, common man, intent only upon fulfilling as perfectly as may be such tasks as come to his hands in a common, work-a-day world? Is it enough for him to be told simply to follow a way without receiving any positive intelligence as to what it is that lies at the end of the way in which he is invited to walk?

When the Buḍḍha, having instructed and thoroughly grounded the first of His disciples in His Teaching and Practice, despatched them upon their mission to the world, it is recorded that He sent them out with the words: "Go ye forth for the welfare, the advantage, the benefit of the many!" With such a charge laid upon them, it would be strange indeed if the message these witnesses bore were not one well within the comprehension of the many; it would be strange were it a message understandable only by the few, by a select minority of the leading minds of

the race. But it is not such a message: it is not a gospel for the few only, but also and equally for the many. The Noble Eightfold Path is for all. It has levels and gradients suited to the capacity of every kind of climber; for the younger and the less vigorous of foot—easy, gently rising slopes; for the older and the stronger—steeper, more direct ways to the summit. And so there is an answer also for the plain man of but limited range of thought, who may ask, it may be with no small degree of quite honest perplexity: "What is this Nibbāna the name of which I hear mentioned so often? All our holy ones speak of it, and yet none seems able to say a word about what it *is*: they only say what it *is not*, so that it looks very much as if after all Nibbāna were just nothing."

For a simple man a simple answer is all that is wanted and that answer is: "Nibbāna is not anything that can be named, and yet it is not nothing."

Listen to this story.

Once upon a time there was a fish. And just because it was a fish, it had lived all its life in the water and knew nothing whatever about anything else but water. And one day as it swam about the pond where all its days had been spent, it happened to meet a turtle of its acquaintance who had just come back from a little excursion on the land.

"Good day, Mr. Turtle!" said the fish; "I have not seen you for a long time. Where have you been?

"Oh!" said the turtle, "I've just been for a little trip on dry land."

"On dry land!" exclaimed the fish. "What do you mean by 'on dry land'? There is no 'dry land' I never met such a thing. Dry land is nothing."

"Well," said the turtle good-naturedly, "if you want to think so, of course you may; there's no one can hinder you. But that's where I've been, all the same."

"O come," said the fish, "try to talk sense. Just tell me now: what is this land of yours like? Is it at all wet?"

"No, it is not wet," said the turtle.

"Is it nice and fresh and cold?" asked the fish.

"No, it is not nice and fresh and cold," the turtle replied.

"Is it clear, so that light can come through it?"

"No, it is not clear; light cannot come through it."

"Is it soft and yielding so that I could move my fins about in it and push my nose through it?"

"No, it is not soft and yielding; you could not swim in it."

"Does it move or flow in streams?"

"No, it neither moves nor flows in streams."

"Does it ever rise up into waves, then, with white foam on them?" asked the fish, becoming just a little impatient at this string of "Noes".

"No," replied the turtle truthfully, "it never rises up into waves that I have seen."

"There now!" exclaimed the fish triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you that this land of yours was just nothing? I have just asked, and you have answered me that it is neither wet nor cool, nor clear nor soft, and that it doesn't flow in streams nor rise up into waves. And if it isn't a single one of these things and can't do any of these things, what else is it but nothing? Don't tell me!"

"Well, well," said the turtle, "if you are determined to think that dry land is nothing, I suppose you must just go on thinking so. But anyone who knows what is water and what is land would say you were just a very silly fish, for you think that anything you have never known, just because you have never known it, is therefore nothing."

And with that the turtle turned away and, leaving the fish behind in its little pond of water, set out on another excursion over the land that was "nothing".

Those who say that Nibbāna is nothing are just like the fish in this story. Because Nibbāna is not like anything we know of, and therefore cannot be described in any words we are wont to use, therefore they think and say that it is just nothing. But just as the wise and experienced turtle, who has been both in water and on dry land, knows for a certainty that, although dry land is different from everthing that water is, it yet is not nothing, so the Lord Buḍḍha and all of His disciples who, following His Way, have arrived at "the final deliverance

of the mind that comes through wisdom"—who have come to Awakening, to Boḍhi, to Nibbāna—all these know both the waters of the *tiloka*, of the three worlds, the worlds of desire, of the formed, and of the formless, and the dry land of *lokuttara*, the solid land of Nibbāna; and they know that that land of Nibbāna is not nothing. They know that while this watery world of Kāma, in which men live, is Anicca, changing, inconstant, never the same for two moments together; that land of Nibbāna is Nicca, constant, unchanging, ever the same. They know that while this world is subject to Dukkha, troubled by the tempestuous waves of all manner of sorrows and calamities; that land of Nibbāna is altogether free from any sorrow or pain. And so when they come to us with tidings of that which they have found beyond the waters of the painful world, it is not with the downcast faces and doleful words of those who have found nothing, but with the serene and cheerful countenances, the glad and happy speech of those who have found something better far than aught they ever have found before. Worldly well-being is good, but the good Nibbāna offers is something so much better that they simply cannot find any worldly words in which fitly to describe it: they can only say that it is not joy, it is something so much better than any joy our changing world affords; they can only tell that it is not happiness, so much superior is it to any happiness our earth can show. Worldly joy and

happiness are good, but Nibbāna so far outweighs them that the Lord Buḍḍha and His Arahans without regret could leave all worldly happiness behind them, the happiness men find in wife and child and home, and count well spent the years of solitary, strenuous striving that followed, since in the end these brought them to this supreme good of all.

No, Nibbāna is not nothing : it only so far surpasses any good of earth that one can give it no fitting name —no name that will not make it less than what it really is ; it only so much excels all happiness of earth that one can assign it no proper and suitable form. Thus, beyond all names, all forms that we can give, it yet *is*. Truly no tongue may tell *what* it is ; but this is so, not because it is nothing, but because it is something so much greater and grander than anything known to our world that every attempt to phrase that greatness and grandeur in earthly speech perforce must fail and fall short of expressing its supreme, its incomparable, reality. It is not something that can be spoken of : it is too high for speech ; speech is for it too low. But it is something that can be *realised*—something that one day, soon or late, shall be realised by every one of us, even as already it has been realised by all the Holy Ones of the past. Meanwhile what we have to do is to cease from all our efforts to describe the indescribable —efforts that are, and always must be, vain—and to apply the energy thus saved to the following of the

Way which will bring us to that which we seek. Arrived thither, we then shall surely *know* all that which at present we can only guess and surmise. And the Way that leads to this Great Good beyond all speech, all description, all languages, not to be talked of, only to be realised—that Way is even the Way of which the Buddha tells in His Fourth Noble Truth: the Way of Right Seeing, Right Aspiring, Right Doing, Right Speaking, Right Living, Right Endeavouring, Right Remembering and Right Reflecting.

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